1: Bowen-Jones et al. K-5 (1955-1958) 1961
EZ6 Malta EZ6

B. The Lands of a Maltese Family

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It has been found possible to trace the landholding history of a single family back to its very beginning through four generations and slightly more than 100 years. Before about 1850, the family in question had no direct proprietary interest in land. Its members were landless labourers working mainly in the fields of various farmers in the northern districts of the island. They appear to have moved from farm to farm as demands for labour arose. Frequently they worked as a team, occasionally as individuals but always they were paid on a daily basis. Their home was in the casal of Mosta, and there is still some attachment to that centre, although few members of the family continue to reside there.

This study is based, fundamentally, on the oral tradition of the family, refined by studies of the Farm Register, Government Land Records and field identification. For ethical reasons, the family must remain anonymous; its members are therefore referred to by key numbers. The founder-father of our family and his five children are designated 0 to 5 as below. The progeny of each son are numbered similarly, the digits suffixed to the parent's number and so throughout. In addition, the lineage groups stemming from the original five children are distinguished by the letter A to E. Final suffixes 0 denote husbands of the females of the family.

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The history begins in the 1850's with a family of five children and their father (0). Four of the children (2-5) were sons and worked for some time with their father as farm labourers. At some stage, the daughter (1), married a farmer with land in the Manikata area, and from her springs branch A of the family. Later, one of the brothers (2) married the daughter of a farmer who held most of his land at Ġnejn Għajn Tuffieħa, and lived nearby. On the death or retirement of his father-in-law, 2 acquired the tenancy of this land in the third year of an eight year lease which had commenced in 1862. Finding that he was unable to work this farm satisfactorily by himself he invited one of his brothers (3) to join him in the enterprise. When the eight year lease was renewed for a similar period, in 1870, both brothers became joint tenants. Their respective descendants form groups B and C of the genealogy. Another piece of land, which had been leased by 2's father-in-law for 99 years from 1861, passed to 2, neither 3 nor his descendants having any share in it.

Meanwhile, in 1857 or 1858, the father (0) and his two remaining sons (4 and 5) acquired the tenancy of an area of partially irrigable land at the head of the Ġnejna valley. Some 12 months earlier the land, with its terraces, had been severely damaged by floodwaters following very heavy rain. The landowner concerned was unwilling to assist the sitting tenant in the repair of severe storm damage to the extent which that tenant expected. Rather than bear alone the full cost, the latter attempted to sub-let outside his own family and was dispossessed by the owner. Our landless labourer (0) and his two sons (4 and 5) evidently felt themselves capable of tackling this reconstruction and, with the landowner's approval, took over the tenancy. It is uncertain whether the landlord gave them assistance in the form of reduced rent, whether they had some capital saved from their meagre wages which they could exploit here, or whether they depended for success entirely on their own labour. Some capital must have been available to them to cover the period of reconstruction and the sale of the first season's crop. It would be characteristic of the period if some financial help was given by the *pitkali* merchants who functioned as the land bank of that day.

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There is evidence that local opinion did not rate highly the chances of this landless group in restoring the valley to its former fertility. The story is told of local comment that the family would not stay 'from Christmas Day to St. Stephen's' (25th-26th December). After 100 years of continuous occupation the story affords the family some considerable amusement, but serves to illustrate the shaky nature of the original enterprise.

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Fig. 139 The Landholdings of a Maltese Family

[p. 308-A]

1:Bowen-Jones et al. K-5 (1955-1958) 1961
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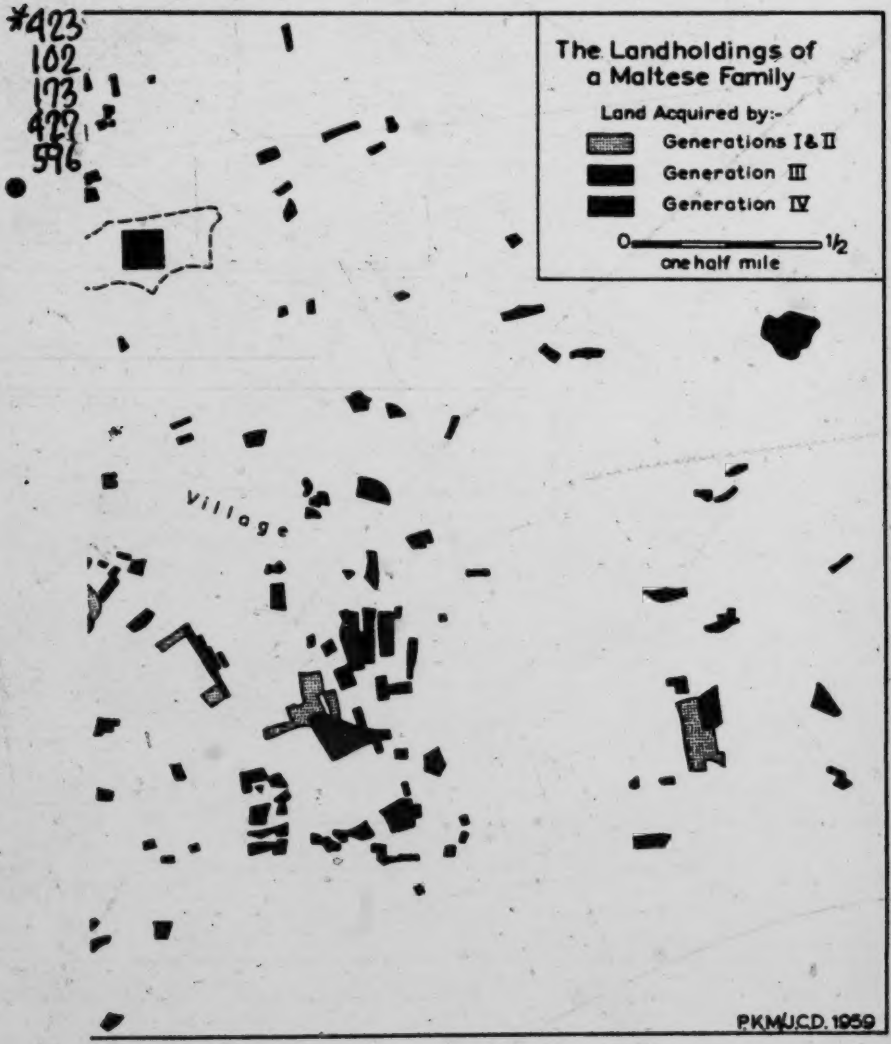

Fig. 139
The Landholdings of a Maltese Family.

[p. 308-B]

1: Bowen-Jones et al. K-5 (1955-1958) 1961
EZ6 Malta EZ6

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This valley land, occupied by 0, 4 and 5, was not originally a single continuous plot, for two other tenants occupied land within the perimeter. At some date, the holdings of these tenants were absorbed by the family, for today the whole plot is held by members of groups D and E, the descendants of 4 and 5. It has belonged, throughout, to a single owner and has been held for many years on an annual lease. For many members of the family it still forms the nucleus of their holdings, though each now works a relatively small portion of it.

Probably in 1880, 5 acquired the tenancy of two 4-*tmien* plots of a 29-*tmien* tenement near to this nucleus, on flat land to the east of the valley and the lease was later renewed, on similar terms, to one of 5's sons (54). On termination of the second lease, an increase of rent was mooted, to which 54 could not agree. After five months, no alternative tenant had been found and 54 therefore re-occupied at the old rent. He took two of the six portions into which the 29 *tmien* were divided, intending one for a brother, who however, did not require it. Both portions are retained by 54's descendants.

One year after this re-entry, 5 and his three brothers were approached by the agent to become tenants of another patch of less fertile land (75 *tmien* including rock). The division was uneven, 2 receiving a nominal 1½ *tmien* despite the plot's proximity to his home and other land. 5, perhaps as the principal tenant, acquired a lion's share (33 *tmien*).

The agent's inability to find alternative tenants for the 8 *tmien* of land and his soliciting of the family to occupy the larger plot, seem to indicate a marked

[p. 308-C]

1: Bowen-Jones et al. K-5 (1955-1958) 1961
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absence of land hunger at this period, 1895 to 1896. Such a situation had probably existed for some years, since there is no information that other land taken over as a new tenancy, again by 5, at the beginning of that decade was 'lying idle'; at the expiration of a long lease. The area concerned was again substantial and 5, unable or unwilling to tackle the whole plot, joined with two brothers from a nearby hamlet in making a successful bid for the tenement. The land, and also the rent which they had jointly agreed to pay, was then sub-divided, local conditions of soil and quality being taken into consideration.

At some time, possibly during this period, the other brothers, 2 and 3, added to the land obtained by marriage at Ghajn Tuffieha (as a new tenancy and with strangers as co-tenants) another 35 *tmien* some two miles to the south-east, close to what is now the parish boundary in that direction. At a later date (c. 1910) 2 and his son, 21, entered on a new tenement of irrigated land in the Wied tal-Pwales to the north of Ghajn Tuffieha. This was immediately divided into two approximately equal portions, of which the father's was eventually shared only amongst his other children.

The land initially acquired by 2 (the founder of group B) from his wife's family was Government land, which was already at that date split into a number of separate plots, but the other lands acquired by this second generation as new tenancies were fairly large blocks of land, averaging 36 *tmien* in area, including the two 4-*tmien* plots of land leased to 5.

It is clear, therefore, that during the 50 years before 1910 quite large blocks of land in northern Malta were coming on to the leasehold market, and that a family without previous rights of any sort in that land could enter on to it, apply sufficient capital and industry to maintain its hold and, within limits, dictate the amount of rent which it was willing to pay for the use of that land. All the land leased for the first time during this period belonged to owners of large private or ecclesiastical estates and some at least had been surrendered on the termination of long leases. There is strong evidence from all branches of the family that all land leased during this period has stayed within the group, though some naturally has passed to daughters on their marriage. The land acquired in the male line by 0 and 2-5 in this early period is mapped at Fig. 139.

This area mapped in Fig. 139 totals 262 *tmien* and was held by the four brothers in the proportions shown in Table 42.

Table 42. Maximum holdings of generation II. *Tmien*.

	Sons of Farmer 0				
	Son 2 (B)	Son 3 (C)	Son 4 (D)	Son 5 (E)	Total
Acquired by marriage	12½	7½	-	-	19½
New tenancies	21½	42½	56½	121½	242½
Total leasehold	34	49½	56½	121½	262
Freehold	-	-	-	-	-
Total area	34	49½	56½	121½	262
No. of non-contiguous plots	?	?	8	8	?

Even at this early stage, there is considerable disparity in the size of holdings, though this would partly disappear if the relative proportions of irrigated and waste land were taken into account. None of the brothers had any significant financial interests outside farming. 2 and 3 seem to have lived at Ġnejn Ghajn Tuffieha but the others remained at Mosta, though many week-nights were spent in rooms which they had in a building at the head of the Ġnejna valley.

1: Bowen-Jones et al. K-5 (1955-1958) 1961
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As the circumstances of land acquisition would indicate, these early holdings were not excessively 'fragmented' but the seeds of later more complex patterns had been set by the lease of non-contiguous properties and the parcellation amongst themselves or with unrelated co-tenants of large tenements newly leased. However, we must remember that, although the male line of the family held no land before c. 1860, this is certainly not true of all the families into which O's sons and their descendants married. Accordingly, 2's children and the children of later marriages were only partially descended from the landless strain. With the legal right of equality of division of all heritable property regardless of sex, the expectations of later scions would therefore be enhanced. It must also be remembered that all land held by the later descendants of O, whether acquired by descent through the family, by marriage, new tenancy or purchase, may with equal validity be considered as the land of other families, whose sons and daughters marry into the family which we have chosen to study. It is a valid case of 'gaining a son, not losing a daughter'. In the present (fourth) generation the family is fully integrated into a complex web of relationships within the village. Indeed an informant has remarked that if someone in the village is not related to him, that person must be a stranger and newcomer to the area.

Notwithstanding these considerations, clarity can only be preserved by maintaining the idea of the family as a developing entity in terms of which land is gained, lost or divided. Division is the normal process by which lands may pass in effect into the hands of a single child, though siblings may be entitled to some form of compensation. Division to all the children need not take place at the same time, an elder child may even receive its share while a younger brother is still unborn. In these circumstances, 'shares' cannot be precise, though efforts may be made to re-adjust at a later stage. A share of parental land is normally the first which a young farmer begins to work as his own. If, as is usual, his departure from the family farm was occasioned by marriage, he may also obtain land from his father-in-law, but this is never *his* in the same sense and is only effectively consolidated with the land of his own family when his children, born of that wife, come to work it on their own behalf.

Generation 3

All the brothers of the second generation are now dead, the last having died c. 1936, and their landholdings split up. The pattern of acquisition of land by the third generation is shown in Fig. 139. Family land passed very unevenly to these groups. For example, in group C, although there were seven other children all land came ultimately to the husband of one daughter (3 to 35). Initially the farm was divided amongst the children.

Table 43. Holdings of Generation III: Group C. *Tmien.*

s = son; d = daughter.

	31s	32s	33s	34d	35/36d	37d	38d	Total
Division from parent: 3	¼	¼	¼	¼	45½	¼	¼	49½
Transfers among siblings	-¼	-¼	-¼	-¼	+4	-¼	-¼	4
Total land and max. holding	¼	¼	¼	¼	49½	¼	¼	-
Total land to be passed on	-	-	-	-	49½	-	-	49½
Leasehold	-	-	-	-	49½	-	-	49½

Note: Some of 35's siblings have a little land elsewhere.

In other groups, the demands of each child were more nearly equal, but in none was there a rigid egalitarian sub-division. Even in group B, where all the children received some land, its distribution seems to have been controlled by

need rather than any rigid adherence to the legal issues. All but one of 2's children remained fundamentally within the farming community. The exception (24) married a non-farmer, but even she was given a share of the irrigated land of her mother's portion, presumably to use as a vegetable garden.

Table 44. Holdings of Generation III: Group B. *Tmien*.

s = son; d = daughter.

	21s	22s	23s	24d	25d	26d	27d	Total	Ex. 25d.
Division from parent: 2	3	4½	5½	½	1½	11½	7½	34	
Acquired by marriage	7½	3½	-	-	*	2	2	15½	
New tenancies	†32½	11	5	-	n.d.	12½	8½	69½	
Purchase	7½	5	5	-	n.d.	-	-	17½	
Transfers among siblings	-	†22½	-15½	-½	-	-	-6	22½	
Transfers outside family	-	-	-	-	n.d.	-2	-2	-4	
Total land held	50½	46	15½	½	c. 66½	25½	18	c. 223½	156½
Maximum holding size	50½	46	10½	½	c. 66½	25½	18½	c. 218½	151½
Total land to be passed on	50½	46	-	-	c. 66½	23½	10½	c. 196½	130½
Leasehold	43½	41			n.d.	23½	10½		117½
Freehold	20½	5	-		n.d.	-	-		12½

*circa 65 *tmien* at Attard. †Of which 11 *tmien* later purchased.

Table 44 shows the distribution of 2's 34 tmien of land, and other data relating to group B. Analysis of this distribution is complicated by the diverse qualities of 2's land holding, especially with regard to irrigated and dry land. But even when allowance is made for this factor, shares cannot be considered equal. The shares of 26 and 27, which passed to their husbands 260 and 270, were inflated by the inclusion of much dry land, but 26 still had a disproportionately large share from her father, perhaps because 260 had little land in his own right (2 *tmien*); the same might also be said of 270. 21 had already halved a tenement with his father (10 *tmien* of his new tenancies) and therefore received only a share of his mother's land, and none of that later added by his father. His brother (22) had a relatively small holding initially, but added to it substantially later in life, when he took over the land of some of his brothers and sisters. Similar divisions are apparent in groups D and E.

Of their generation, group B were the most assiduous in adding to land holdings by purchase and new tenancies. Had it not been for their low fertility (23, 24 and 26 had no children, though all were married) they would have dominated the family in later generations. It will have been noticed that much care was taken that 2's children should have a share in their mother's land, while land later added by the father was distributed more partially. The mother's land comes into the family essentially for the use of herself and her children and where there are no children it must be returned eventually to her family. Similar logic applies to land or use of land *inherited* by the father, as is exemplified by 260's 2 *tmien* which, when it became clear that 260 and his wife would not produce issue, was given to his sister for her children. In contrast to some of his brothers and sisters, 22 had a large, vigorous, agriculturally-minded family and this, no doubt, stimulated him into adding to his initially relatively small holding, for not only would his children's labour permit him to expand but also their future welfare would demand it.

1: Bowen-Jones et al. K-5 (1955-1958) 1961
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The basic pattern is thus one of more or less unequal division amongst those children who wish to take up their rights of pre-emption on land, with greatest emphasis on the equality of division of land coming ultimately from a grandparent. At a later stage, 'family' land tends to become concentrated into the hands of the more interested children (e.g. 350 and 22), and along with it some land added by their siblings. The volume of lands added other than by marriage is very much less than during generation II. New tenancies, which totalled 242¼ *tmien* of the holdings of 2, 3, 4 and 5, in the holdings of their children amounted to only 93¼ *tmien*, although there were at this latter stage 11 individuals actively interested in farming in the district. Sixteen new tenements were entered by this generation and the average size was 7¼ *tmien* (c.f. Generation II: 35 tmien). Of these, two were outstandingly large and in both cases tenancy was shared with members of other generations. The smaller (20¾ *tmien*) was occupied by 21 and his father (2) in c. 1910, while the other (30 *tmien*) was a co-tenancy between 21, 54, 5410 (54's son-in-law, generation IV) and a stranger, taken up in 1916. Thus, within a short space of six years, or perhaps a little more, three generations were actively acquiring land, this being some measure of the considerable interdigitation of the generations which makes it impossible to refer any one generation to any specific period in Malta's economic history. Where precise dates are known the evidence is thus the more valuable.

An example of the circumstances in which these new tenancies were added is illuminating. In 1916, the sitting tenant of the 30-*tmien* plot mentioned above attempted to sub-let the land to a non-relative. Not only was this done without the owner's permission but he also attempted to exact a premium from his proposed sub-tenant. The landlord was informed and the tenant evicted. Agreement was almost reached between the owner and a prospective new tenant, 410's father, when it was suggested by the owner's lawyer that a higher rent might be obtained on the open market. The tenancy was therefore published, in the traditional way - at Mass in the parish church - and, the joint bid of 21, 54 and 5410 being the highest, they were offered the tenement. The defeated applicant asked if he might share in the tenancy and, in view of the earlier negotiations, all parties agreed to this. This transaction, with the relatively small size of the other new tenancies, would seem to indicate that considerable competition for land had developed since the larger acquisitions of the previous generation. There is here certainly no evidence of land lying idle for five months as had happened in 1895.

The average size of plot added by marriage during this generation was also small, some 5¼ *tmien*. A small size is to be expected since these are all subdivisions of other families' land. The increase in total marriage land over the previous generation is roughly proportional to the increase in the number of marriages. As previously, 50 per cent. of the marriages in which the partners continue as agriculturalists involve no exchange of land, but in at least one of these cases (41) land passed from the wife's family directly to the children at a time when they were already independent of their father. Similarly, parts of the marriage lands of 210, 510 and 530 were also passed in this way directly from grandparent or uncle or aunt to the child. This process further emphasises that the land in question is not a dowry in the normal sense of the word, but essentially a settlement on the expected issue of the marriage.

A clear illustration of the economic advance of the family lies in its acquisition, during the third generation, of freehold land. It is doubly significant that only 1¾ *tmien* of the 35¼ *tmien* freehold came into the family by marriage, the rest was actually purchased by members of a family which, one or two generations earlier, were not even the occupiers of rented land. Most of this freehold land came into group B, where 21 and his brothers purchased 28¾ *tmien*.

In these different ways 167¼ *tmien* near the old nucleus and some 100 *tmien* elsewhere have been added to the 262 *tmien* handed down from generation II. In contrast, only 4 tmien has passed out of family control during the period. The distribution of this additional land is shown in Fig. 130 where its increased 'scatter' and the smaller size of the unit pieces makes a contrast with the earlier distributions.

By the time this generation was at its prime, the village had grown both in size and facilities and achieved parish status. Gradually houses were built and the old attachment to Mosta was at least partially broken, but some of the farmers retain a house in the casal, now often rented to British Service families from ta'Qali airfield. Saved the need to travel to and from the casal, and increased dispersal of plots will matter much less to the farmer than if that journey still had to be made.

More directly of concern to him will be the size of his holding. As there are now 13 farmers where formerly there were only four and since the total local area has been increased by appreciably less than 100 per cent., the farmer of generation III must, on the average, have a smaller holding than did his parent or parent-in-law. 350, holding all his father-in-law's land is one exception, and there is considerable diversity from individual to individual and group to group.

Many of the third generation are still alive, some retain control of land and one or two are still actively farming small remnants of their holdings. Therefore it would not be possible to examine the transmission of all their land to the succeeding generation. Nor indeed would this be necessary to the present study since the distribution, so far as it has taken place, has followed the same pattern as that from generation II. However, one aspect of the inheritance of land can best be studied at this stage, an aspect scarcely touched upon earlier. That concerns the physical division of a father's holding when it passes to his children. For example, is a holding of ten plots belonging to a farmer with five sons split into five components each with ten plots, every original plot being divided equally to each son - or, if all the plots are of uniform size will each son receive two plots only? This question is clearly of importance to the whole problem of *parcellement* and *morcellement*. That the true position lies somewhere between the two hypotheses given above is evidenced by the subsequent history of 54's holding outlined below.

At its maximum, 54's holding comprised 142 plots in six localities, a total area of 74 *tmien*, distributed as shown in Table 45.

Table 45. Holdings of 54. Locality, number of plots and area.

Locality	No. of plots	Size of plots				Total
		(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	
A	2	4 tm.	4 tm.	-		8 tm.
B	2	30 tm.	½ tm.	-		30½ tm.
C	3	3½ tm.	1 tm.	3 tm.		7½ tm.
D	4	8½ tm.	3½ tm.	2½ tm.	4 tm.	17½ tm.
E	1	7½ tm.				7½ tm.
F	1	3 tm.				3 tm.

He had six children (541-546) equally divided among the sexes and the amount of land given to each child varied enormously (Table 46), the daughters receiving small portions, the eldest son somewhat more, while the two younger brothers received two-thirds of the total land, which they work in partnership. The two elder daughters each married men with substantial land holdings. Their sister married a butcher who normally takes no part in farming but did work on the land during the recent war. At present the butcher's land is worked by 543 on a profit-sharing basis. 543 became independent of his father at an early age and has acquired a not inconsiderable farm (52 *tmien*) by purchase from his wife's family as well as from his father either direct or through siblings. These facts doubtless explain the inequality of the father's sub-division, and

[i.e., The third generation of the family under discussion -- Analyst]

1: Bowen-Jones et al. K-5 (1955-1958) 1961
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the portion which 544 and 546 work jointly represents the remnant holding which they and their father worked jointly after the other children had received land. Some of it is still held by the father who takes a nominal share of the profits.

Table 46. Allotments to each of 84's children, showing plot number and areas which each received.

541 d	542 d	543 s	545 d	544 s/546 s
pt. C(a) 1t.	A(a) 4t.	pt. B(a) ½t.	pt. D(a) 3½t.	pt. A(b) 4t.
D(d) 4t.	pt. B(a) ½t.	pt. C(a) 1t.		pt. B(a) 29½t.
		pt. D(a) 1½t.		B(b) ½t.
		E 7½t.		pt. C(a) 1½t.
				C(b) 1t.
				C(c) 3t.
				pt. D(a) 3½t.
				D(b) 2½t.
				D(c) 2½t.
				F 3t.
8t.	4½t.	10½t.	3½t.	80½t.

Table 46 shows the extent to which plots have been sub-divided. On the whole the smaller plots have passed unbroken to the children (e.g. A(a) and (b), C(b) and (c), and D(b), (c) and (d)) but so has E(a) which is a fairly large fertile plot. Plot B, also, is little broken, though 542 and 543 each have a small portion for the supply of fruit to their respective family tables.

The fourth generation received paternal land according to the same patterns as the preceding one, and a similar generalisation applies to their acquisition of new land.

Table 47. Acquisition of new land by generation IV.

Groups	B	C	D	E	Total
From grandparent	4½		3½	17½	25½
Marriage	34½	26½	72½	151½	183½
New tenancy	35½	3½	8½	20	65½
Purchase	7			51½	58½
Miscellaneous*				5½	5½
Total	81½	30½	81½	244½	338½

*In trust for step-son.

The proportions acquired in the different ways have however changed substantially. Some indication of the extent to which the family are now integrated into the local community may be had from the amount of land now acquired by

1: Bowen-Jones et al. K-5 (1955-1958) 1961
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marriage (60 per cent. of the total), but there are now a greater number of family members interested in land - 31 in all, though only 22 have holdings of a size likely to produce an adequate family income. The net per capita change over the generation is a significant reduction in the area added, especially in the area added by new tenancies which in generation III resulted in an increase of 93½ *tmien*. Further, the increase indicated in Table 47 is significantly influenced by a tenement newly entered by one member of the family (2130) which, in one large block of land, amounted to 38½ *tmien*. All other new tenancies were relatively small pieces of land. The same applies, in fact, to all the land added at this time and, while land held by the family is gradually becoming an increasingly significant proportion of the total land in the locality, the outer spatial limit of new acquisitions is becoming increasingly wider (Fig. 139).

Naturally, generation V, some of whom are still babes-in-arms, has not yet been long enough active in the field for any clear patterns to show, but some transfers of land have take place. There does however seem to be evidence of an increasing proportion of children receiving only small garden plots from their parents, their major source of income being clearly outside farming. Throughout the period considered, 'garden land' of this sort has increased, though the pattern is obscured by overlapping generations (e.g. group C, generation III was somewhat younger and therefore later developing than other groups).

In the foregoing section, the landholding history of a family has been examined in historical depth. Both the methods of acquiring new land and the means of sub-dividing land already held are seen to result in more scattered and smaller plots. Although all children have pre-emptions to their parents' land, by no means all such rights are in fact taken up. In general, sons receive more land than daughters, while dowry land, so-called, is seen to have rather a more special function than that term implies. Although the availability of land has varied from period to period, energetic individuals seem always to have been able to build up their holdings to a viable size, partly perhaps by judicious choice of a marriage partner. Nevertheless, since c. 1870 there has been a general decrease in the size of farm.

Much of this evidence confirms and in part explains the trends observed in the general statistical material and the study of the Żebbuġ-Siġġiewi area. The legal evidence, which as was shown earlier allowed for the possibility of extreme sub-division, is only relevant so far as individuals and economic conditions enforce such extremes. In so far as law and custom support the maintenance of a family's control over land, field evidence suggests that law and custom prevail, for very little land entering the family is subsequently lost. On the other hand, attempts to sub-let outside a family group are seen again and again to result in forfeiture of land which our expanding family were quick to seize upon.

In conclusion, it must be pointed out that, although fragmentation has not proceeded to a degree made possible in law, it has developed with fair rapidity during the period of this survey. Had fragmentation proceeded everywhere in the Island at the same speed in longer-established farming families, it would certainly have reached a more critical phase than it patently has. There seem to be three possible explanations of this apparent contradiction. Firstly there may have been some factor, as yet unknown, which inhibited considerable general fragmentation and which ceased to operate as from 70 or 80 years ago. The nineteenth century development of Government Lands, or some element in the emigrating pattern may be involved. Secondly, there may be a socio-economic limit to the process which our family has just reached, bringing it into line with conditions in older families - extensive inter-marriage may be a factor here. Or finally, there may be special forces within a developing family unit, perhaps not unrelated to the spirit of determination which led G and his sons with little capital to take upon themselves the task of restoring 100 *tmien* of storm-ravaged land, which would not apply to other groups. Certainly some individual members of the family studied display a peasant-like devotion to the soil which is becoming increasingly rare in Malta.